

22 January 2024

Dear Mr Vickers

On the 15 – 17 January 2024, Alan Edwards HMI and three team inspectors carried out a monitoring visit which focussed on one recommendation from the local authority's core local government education services inspection in March 2022. The visit was the second pilot of the new monitoring visit arrangements. The team considered progress against recommendation 1. This visit was jointly agreed with you and the Director of Education. Below is a brief summary of our findings.

Recommendation 1 - Improve outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools

Since the last monitoring visit, the Chief Executive and Strategic Director (Children and Families) have continued to hold the education directorate to account suitably for securing improvements to the quality of support for schools. They have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the authority's secondary schools.

The Director of Education has secured and shared a clear vision for school and service improvement. This vision is underpinned by high expectations and increased levels of accountability. This has helped to define the roles and responsibilities of officers, schools and the EAS in securing better outcomes for pupils.

The local authority and the EAS have worked in partnership suitably to review arrangements for school improvement. As a result, schools now have a clearer understanding of the role of these services in supporting them. The local authority receive helpful information about the work of schools from the regional consortium. This, along with the authority's own processes, has helped officers to develop a more thorough understanding of the progress that schools are making. In particular, 'Team around the school' and professional discussions provide a beneficial forum for schools, the local authority and the EAS to target, monitor and review support. In the best cases, reports on schools identify clear strengths and areas for improvement which helps officers to plan

Estyn, Llys Angor/Anchor Court, Heol Keen/Keen Road, Caerdydd/Cardiff, CF24 5JW
Ffôn/Telephone 02920 446446

ymholiadau@estyn.llyw.cymru • enquiries@estyn.gov.wales
www.estyn.llyw.cymru • www.estyn.gov.wales

Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth. | Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.

targeted support for schools. However, some quality assurance processes are in the early stages of development and the quality of reports are too variable. This limits the ability of the local authority to evaluate fully the impact of all of its support.

Senior leaders in the local authority now hold the EAS to account more effectively for their work, for example through partnership meetings and the Accelerated Improvement Group (AIG). In addition, the AIG enables senior leaders and members to hold officers at all levels to account for the impact of their work. Recently, the local authority has requested a strengthened evaluation of the impact of professional learning provided by the EAS.

The local authority has continued to strengthen its relationships with schools, fostering a culture of trust and openness. Headteachers feel increasingly confident in sharing their views with the local authority and this is helping officers to adapt their support strategies. The sharing of effective practice between schools is in the early stages of development

The local authority is suitably prioritising improving school attendance. They have developed a clear strategy and officers understand and carry out their roles diligently. However, attendance in Torfaen is lower than it was prior to the pandemic, and a small number of schools have attendance levels that cause serious concern.

Since the core inspection, we have inspected six primary schools, five non-maintained settings, one secondary and one special school in Torfaen. None of these schools or settings were placed into any level of follow-up. Two non-maintained settings and two primary schools were asked to provide case studies of effective practice. At the time of the core inspection the local authority had two secondary schools in special measures. One of these schools made sufficient improvements to be removed from follow-up in February 2023; the other remains in special measures after being placed in Estyn monitoring in 2015.

The local authority and the Principal School Improvement Partner have established worthwhile opportunities for local authority officers and School Improvement Partners (SIPs) to discuss and agree support requirements. This is helping to align the work of the SIPs to the local authority's priorities. However, links between SIPs and some other aspects of the education services, for example additional learning needs and attendance, are at an early stage of development.

We hope you found the opportunity to reflect collaboratively on your work helpful. The local authority link inspector for Torfaen will continue to engage with the authority and we will carry out further monitoring visits in the summer term of 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jassa Scott'.

Jassa Scott
Strategic Director